Schools Now and a Century Ago

What New York Has Accomplished in 100 Years of Free Education

At the junction of Tryon row and Chambers street, a locality long ago swept away by the changing conformation of the city, there used to stand a little two story building with a gable roof fronting on the row. It was the first public school house New York ever had and from it have developed the magnificient structures in which seven eighths of young New Yorkers are now educated.

A picture of the old building is here presented for contrast with some of the wonderful creations of architectural ingenuity now existing for the benefit of the new generations of New Yorkers, for this is an interesting period in the city's educational development. In February next New York's public school system will celebrate its one hundredth birthday, and there is to be a great time over the fact.

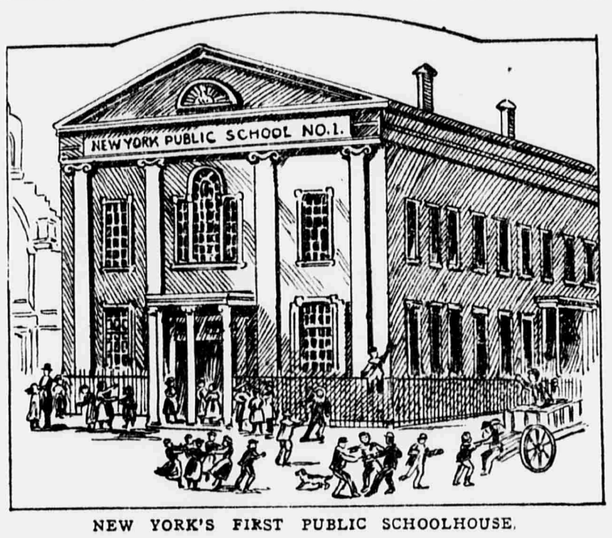
Away back on Feb. 19, 1805, a meeting of good citizens was held in the house of John Murray in Pearl street to see whether something could not be done to provide free instruction for the children of the the people and to remove the stigma of charity from those educated in the only free schools there were.

Constant, Archibald Gracie, William Coit, Benjamin C. Minturn, John McVickar and many others bearing names significant in these days. And then and there was formed the Free School Society of New York, a development of which is the present Board of Education.

The society got itself incorporated by the Legislature and empowered to ask subscriptions with which to open schools. Gov. De Witt Clinton was elected president and headed the subscription list with a gift of $200. The incorporation act passed by the Legislature was entitled "An act to incorporate the society instituted in the city of New York, for the establishment of a free school for education of poor children who do not belong to, or not provided for by, any religious society."

The society changed its name later to the Free School Society of New York, then to the Public School Society of New York. It wiped out all hint of charity about its work, and the Legislature broadened its scope so as to embrace the education of all children not otherwise provided for.

So it worked until in 1853 the Board of Education, already then established some



NEW YORK'S FIRST PUBLIC SCHOOLHOUSE.

Some free schools were already in existence, but they had been established and were conducted by various religious societies solely for the benefit of those of their own faith, and as schools they were not very excellent institutions. The only really good schools in the city, which then had a population of 76,000, were the private academies which charged fairly stiff fees, and these fees not every worthy person desiring to give his children a sound education could afford to pay. The good citizens wanted this remedied.

Many families now famous in the city's history were represented at that meeting. There were there Brockholst Livingston, Samuel Osgood, Gov. De Witt Clinton, Jacob Morton, Samuel Miller, Joseph

years and working in harmony with the society, swallowed it, lock, stock and barrel, and continued alone the work it has since done as a part of the city government.

It wasn't considered advisable in those early days to be too lavish in the matter of education, so the legislative act incorporating the Free School Society provided that its income should not exceed $10,000 a year. In these days the city is spending more than $30,000,000 annually on its schools and is ever ready to spend more when need be.

And nobody, even the benevolent Andrew Carnegie, dreams of extending his benevolence to the public schools. Their care is as much a public duty as the policing of the streets or the putting out of fires.

Anyhow, in the mean time the society went ahead with the enterprise, which then seemed so small and which has developed such mighty results. The first school was opened in May, 1806, in a small apartment in the old mansion house in Bancker, now Madison, street, near Pearl. "In a few days," it is recorded, "the attendance rose to forty-two."

There was one teacher. The funds were obtained in response to an address to the public issued by the society.

Soon there were sixty-seven pupils in the one room. It was overcrowded and the teacher had his hands full. Col. Henry Rutgers, impressed by the good work the society was doing, presented to it a lot in Henry street for a building, but the society wasn't ready then to build.

It got possession of an old workshop adjoining the almshouses and obtained a grant of $500 from the Legislature to spend in repairs to fit the place for school purposes. It moved in there in April, 1807, and managed to squeeze 150 pupils in.

But soon it needed more room and then it got possession of its first schoolhouse, Public School 1, in Tryon row. The building was known as the Old Arsenal.

It had done duty in that capacity back in Colonial times. It was valued at $10,000, and when the city decided in 1808 that it

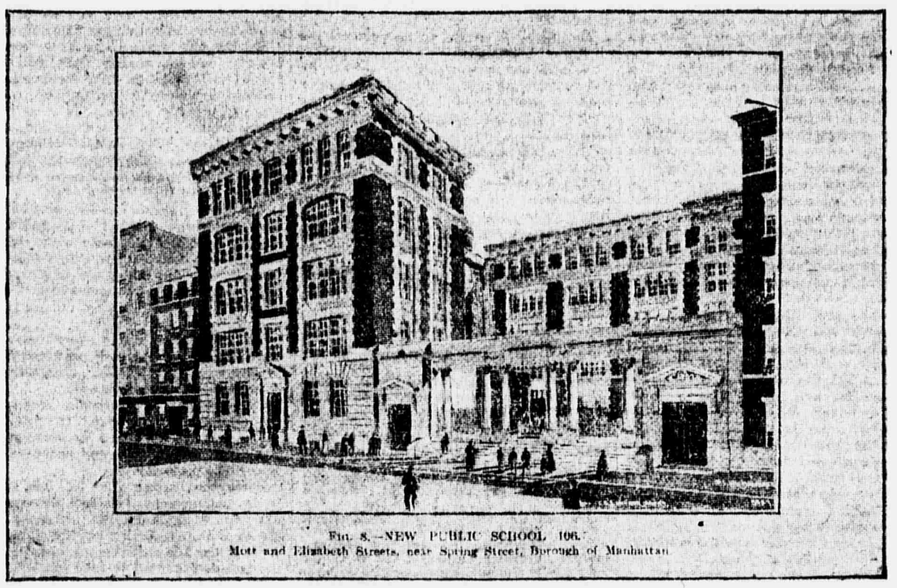


FIG. 8.—NEW PUBLIC SCHOOL 106.
Mott and Elizabeth Streets, near Spring Street, Borough of Manhattan.

THE NEW SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE.

might as well be used for this new fangled free school scheme, there was granted $1,500 more to put it in shape for teaching.

It accommodated 500 pupils. It had an assembly room, a big one as it seemed then, and six classrooms.

The door had a Colonial portico; there was a spiked iron fence running around the building and it had a playground in the back. A mighty fine thing, indeed, it was thought then for children to be educated for nothing in a building like that.

How things have changed! Building and site included, the city spent rather more than a million dollars on its last completed schoolhouse, Public School 62, at Essex and Suffolk streets, also pictured here. The building alone cost $518,000.

It covers a whole block and accommodates 4,500 pupils. It is six stories high and has a basement and sub-basement besides.

Its wall are fireproof, built of granite and steel and its interior is panelled in oak. Its auditorium, lighted by electric lamps, is in the basement and will seat 1,600 persons.

It has separate entrances for boys and girls, contains a gymnasium, a cooking room, a workshop for manual training and 100 class rooms in all. There are twenty classrooms on a floor, and the school has been built with elevator shafts, so that whenever it is considered desirable to take chances with such things, elevators can be put in to save the boys and girls from climbing the stairs. There are even baths in the building.

There doesn't seem to be anything that hasn't been thought of for this building and that isn't there already or cannot be installed with very little trouble. It is quite as wonderful in its way as the most modern apartment house. In one sense, also, it is two schools in one, for it is divided vertically into two buildings, one for boys and one for girls.

This is merely an elementary school. In high schools and other luxuries not dreamed of in the plans of the city's original volunteer educators the city has spent and is spending many millions.

Both architecturally and in every other respect the newest high schools are as elebarate as college buildings either here or abroad and quite as expensive.

To go back to the old schools, however, it wasn't long before School 1 in Tryon row wouldn't hold all of the pupils who wanted to attend. The Free School Society had to hustle to find more room. It obtained it in the corporation rooms at Hudson and Amos streets, and $11,000 was spent in fitting these up.

This was in 1811, six years after that first memorable meeting of good citizens in John Murray's house, where free schools which should be better than charity schools were first talked of. After that schoolhouses were built steadily, first in Col. Rutgers's lot in Henry street, then in various parts of the city as its bounds increased and its population extended.

Never, somehow, did the city schools manage to keep up with the population. They haven't succeeded in doing that yet.

Some of these old schoolhouses are still standing. There is a very fine specimen represented in one of the accompanying pictures in Marion street, near Prince.

This is Public School 21, built in 1846. Though not one of the first structures by any means, it is venerable enough to show the remarkable development that has since taken place.

It is three stories high and, like most of the other schools in this city of scanty space, it has a basement used for playgrounds for boys and girls. It is 50 feet wide by 95 feet deep, and it cost $12,329 to build. The basement is rather a misnomer for its floor is really about a foot above the level of the sidewalk, but the place is gloomy enough.

On the first floor, so called, are four class rooms, and an assembly with a double gallery. In the two stories above are more class rooms, large and small.

There are very few of these old relics left, however, and there would be none if the Board of Education could dispense with them altogether and find itself able to rebuild them rapidly enough. Reconstruction is going on now on an extensive scale whenever strikes in the building trades do not head off the improvements. The usual method of the city is to buy the property alongside the school, tear down this adjoining building, and begin the erection of a school in halves.

When the half adjoining the old school is built, the pupils are moved in there, the old school is torn down and the second half of the new one is put up. In this way no temporary lack of accommodation is suffered—a serious factor in the present overcrowded state of the schools.

Just such an operation as this is now going on at Public School 106 at Mott and Elizabeth streets. Here there is an obsolete type of school building in a district where the schools are all badly overcrowded.

A year ago the city bought up the property on the west of the school and tore down the buildings. It is now erecting there the first section of a new schoolhouse of a type both novel and architecturally attractive. A photograph of this school is shown.

To a person standing in Elizabeth street, facing the school, to the left, where stands the present school building now in use, there will be a five story building devoted principally to class rooms. To the right there is now being built a more picturesque section, in which are the cooking, manual training and other rooms.

The assembly hall is in the basement of this section and is reached by seven stairways. Above it there is an open court to be used as a playground, in the floor of which are vault lights carrying natural light into the basement assembly hall. In front of the court is a beautiful colonnade with iron grille work between the pillars.

Nothing like this style of school has yet been seen in this city, but there is no doubt that it will be a successful variation of the other types of schoolhouses. It will also carry out the Board of Education's idea of introducing architectural beauty into districts where there is all too little of it.

The most popular and most useful style of school building so far in districts where it is undesirable to construct block size schools is known as the H type, because it is in the shape of that capital letter. A picture of these is shown here. Public School 170, fronting Central Park, is considered an excellent specimen.

Most of the old school buildings which the Board of Education is rebuilding are in the middle of a street block. On either side of them are dead walls and at best there is only a shallow light shaft in the rear. This means that the rooms are dependent entirely for light upon the windows in the narrow front and such gleams as can straggle in down the shaft in the rear.

In such a case the board usually buys up, generally under condemnation proceedings, the property in the rear and one side. It is then possible to build an H-shaped schoolhouse.

The arms of the letter represent the building; the spaces between them are open courts, each of which fronts upon a street; the bar between the arms represents a building connecting the two arms.

The main building thus receives light from opposite sides, the connecting buildings from the front and from one side (fronting on the courtyards) also.

One great advantage of this type of building is that it is most easily built in two sections, as is desirable when an old school is to be replaced. Another is that the courtyards can be used for playgrounds for the children.

Great as has been the improvement in school buildings since the days when an old arsenal and a disused workshop were converted into the first public schools New York had, it has only kept pace with the improvements in apparatus, in teaching methods and in the curriculum.

It would astonish the founders of the Free School Society to see free baths and a gymnasium in each new school; to see plants tended by the children in the windows; to hear of the lessons lasting only twenty minutes before change; of the physical exercises between lessons; of nurses and medical attendance supplied free. And the cooking schools, the sewing lessons and the whole principle of vacation schools, playgrounds and recreation centres would be even more startling.

It would be curious to hear Gov. De Witt Clinton's ideas on "an organized playground" in his free school curriculum. He probably wouldn't be quite sure about the place of a piano in it. But every schoolhouse has a piano now, and many of the other ideas are by no means more revolutionary than the Free School Society's notion of giving clothing with their education, as they did at first.

"No work," says a recent report to the Board of Education, "has been more successful than that of the little cooks and housekeepers. Their rooms typified the home and the other classes were called upon to make contributions to them.

"And when a bare, unfurnished room was transformed into a charming living room, by simply using a few yards of denim and silkoline, with here a settle, there a screen, yonder a tabourette, candelabrum on a stand, and simple art decorations on the walls, the children received an object lesson not soon to be forgotten. In the same room the table would be set with faultless regularity and dainty luncheons properly served.

"The girls learned to preserve fruit and prepare many nutritious dishes; and we know that practical applications of all this teaching have entered many homes.

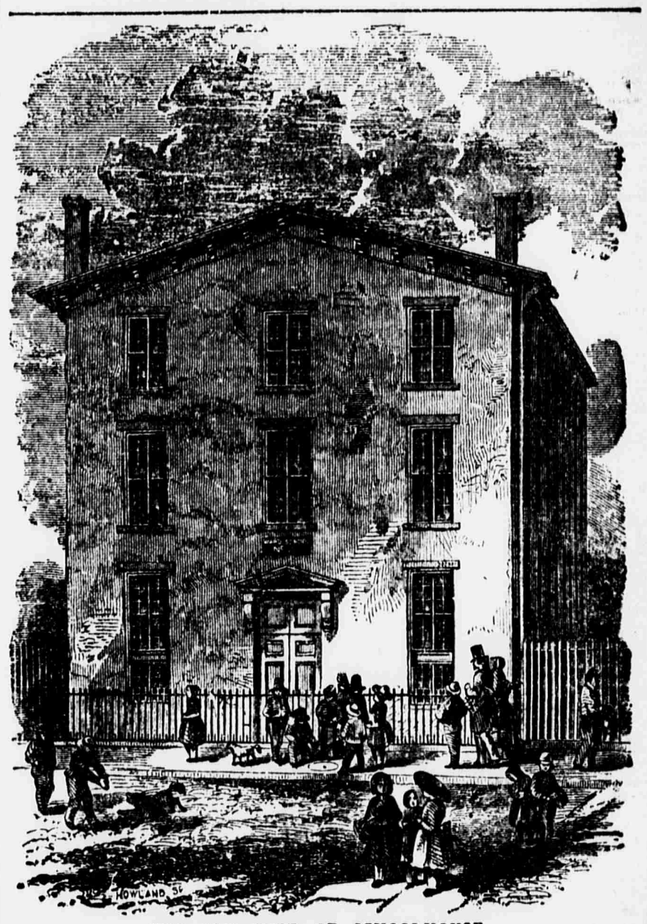
"The trained nurses also contributed much toward an increase of comfort in the overcrowded tenement rooms. The babies, made sweet and clean from the bath, crooned so happily that many a little mother resolved that her charge should never again suffer for so necessary a luxury.

"The preparation of simple foods and remedies for the sick, quick aid to the injured and the doing of common place things in dainty ways were all valuable lessons."

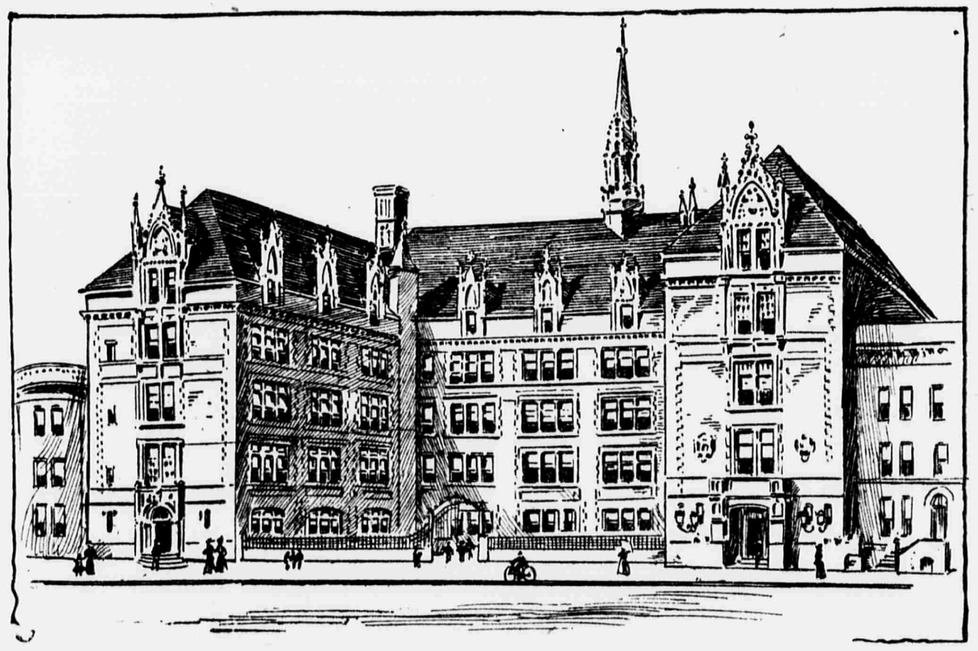
There is likely to be a great time next February, when the centennial of the schools comes around. In no department of the city government has the development been so marked. In no other department does the improvement come so directly home to every citizen. So it is felt by those who have the best means of observing what that development means and how great it has been that this is a fitting event to celebrate.

Secretary A. Emerson Palmer of the Board of Education wrote to President Rogers a short time ago, pointing out what it all meant and suggesting that the hundredth milestone in the city's educational progress should be made memorable to the future citizens the city is teaching to think and work in the right way. Mr. Rogers enthusiastically supported the idea and it will be carried out.

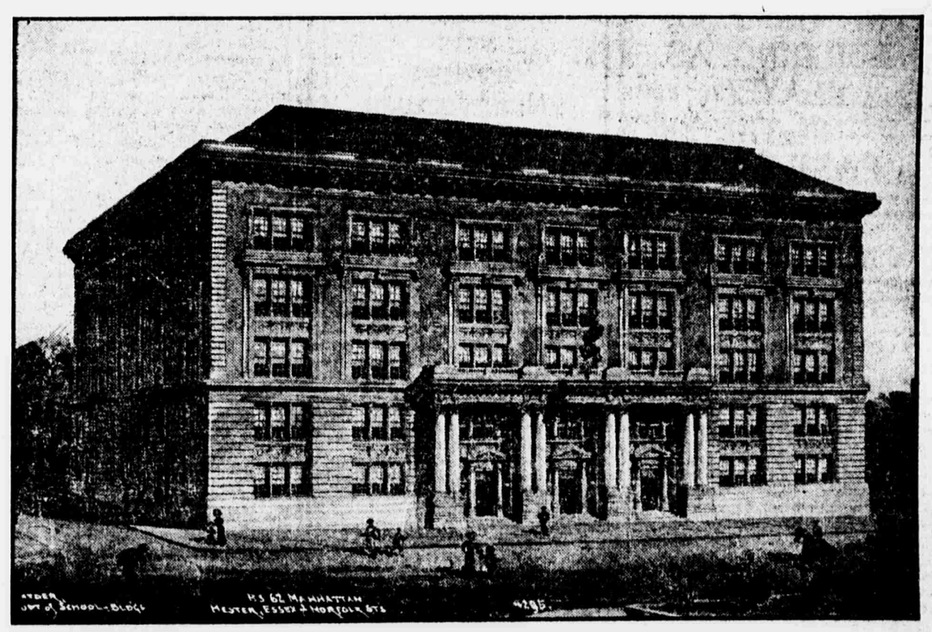
Just what form the celebration will take has not been decided as yet, but there is plenty of time ahead. In the meantime many New Yorkers will be interested to compare what the first schools were with what they are now.



THE OLD TYPE OF SCHOOLHOUSE.
No. 21, in Marion Street.



THE H TYPE OF SCHOOL BUILDING.



THE LAST COMPLETED SCHOOLHOUSE.
Public School 62, on the East Side, which holds 4,500 pupils.

THE OTHER PORT ARTHUR.

A BRITISH HELL ON EARTH IN THE SOUTHERN SEAS.

What the Tasmanian Convict Settlement Looked Like When It Was Recovering From the Horrors of "the System" Thirty Years Ago—Tale the War Recalls

"I see some one has been asking in THE SUN how Port Arthur got its name," said an old sea captain who knows the Pacific "as well as the missus knows her own back yard," as he puts it.

"I've known the place by that name for the last thirty-five years, any way, but just when it came to be so put down on the chart I cannot say. It has been stated recently that it was called after a Lieutenant Arthur of H. M. S. Algerine, who called there in 1580. That may or may not be true, but I'll tell you one thing that I've seen no mention of in connection with the place.

"That is, that it wasn't the first or the most widely known place of that name in the Pacific. Port Arthur was a name of mighty sinister sound and import long before it was applied to what, not so long ago, was only the insignificant little fishing village of Lu-shun-k'ou at the tail end of the Liaotung peninsula. Back in the '40's and '50's, and even in the '60's, there was a Port Arthur known by name to all South Pacific sailors as a regular hell on earth. I had long known its evil reputation, but it was not till along about 1870 that I ever got a chance to see the place.

"I was in the Australian trade in those days and a man would hear mighty queer yarns down there about some of the old Australian and Tasmanian convict settlements. They must have been tough places, every one of 'em; but I reckon there was none that had a worse record than Port Arthur, on the southeast coast of Tasmania and just at the foot of the Tasman Peninsula.

"I tell you some of the old shellbacks chinning in the fo'c'sle at night would spin yarns of queer things that happened in that godforsaken spot. Things of the kind that would give a nervous sailor man the creeps. Murder, suicide, mutiny; even cannibalism in cases where gangs of convicts had escaped and then got lost in the bush and ran short of food, all went to make up the ordinary budget of Port Arthur's stories.

"There were lots of the old 'lags,' as they used to call time-expired convicts, knocking about the southern seas in those days, and from listening to their chin I got to be pretty familiar with the routine of prison life as it had been in those old penal settlements like Botany Bay, Port Macquarie, Norfolk Island and Port Arthur. Once, when I was laying off waiting for a cargo at Hobart Town, along about 1870, I got a chance to go across with a couple of warders who were taking half a dozen prisoners to Port Arthur.

"Now, though the transportation of convicts from England had been stopped by the colonists some years before, the British authorities were still very chary of letting strangers see any of the remoter settlements. There were still strange and sad sights to be seen and all sorts of reminders of a horrible state of things that everybody wished to have forgotton. So, though Port Arthur was at that time still in existence as a prison, it was not the sort of place that sightseers were wanted at. But I had heard so many stories of the place from old hands among my various crews that I felt a sort of uncanny interest and so I went.

"A short run by schooner down to the mouth of the Derwent and across Storm Bay brought us to the entrance to Port Arthur, a grim and desolate looking spot if ever there was one. Almost across the entrance lies the Island of the Dead, where the authorities used to bury those of the convicts who were lucky enough to die, and back of the port was a pile of frowning, gloomy cliffs that ran up into the heavily banked clouds overhead.

"Round one side of the port ran a huge and splendidly built masonry wharf, and this and a number of solid stone buildings and fine broad roads that ran here and there told of the excellence of the old forced convict labor that, under the gentle stimulus of the lash, had built them.

"There was a crowd of convicts on the wharf when we landed, most of them clad in rough woollen stuff of that peculiar dull gray, drab color that no Tasmanian even to-day can see without a thrill of memory that recalls old, never to be forgotten horrors. These were the last remnants of that awful 'system' that will remain one of the foulest blots on England's national memory. Many of them, on whom the lash and the leg irons had done their work well, were bent and crippled, and most of the older ones showed by their dull, bleared eyes and vacant expressions that in them the light of reason had mercifully gone out forever.

"There were in the whole settlement some five or six hundred convicts, lunatics and paupers—most of them left over remnants of the system. A bit o' 'backy quietly offered never failed to make a friendly impression on these poor human derelicts and to arouse a disposition to talk in those in whom there were some glimmerings of reason left.

"Lord, what an appalling record of man's brutality to his helpless fellowman the story of some of those poor wretches' lives would make! We hear a whole lot nowadays about Russia and Siberia, and I've seen things in the Russian prisons at Saghalien that were bad enough; but England's treatment of her Australian and Tasmanian convicts in the early years of the nineteenth century would appal the world if it were more widely known to-day.

"One old fellow that was pathetically grateful for 'baccy didn't look any more criminal or harmful than a child. A weak face, with a kindly smile that was blended of childlike innocence and senility, disarmed suspicion in a moment. And yet this poor old human wreck had been a prisoner for over forty years, and had been flogged for insubordination—fifty to a hundred lashes at a séance—so many times that he had long forgotten the count; though his back, which he showed me, bore him witness; for it was scarred and corrugated like the bark of a fire-scorched tree. He was bent almost double and scarred and crippled with the weight of arm and leg and neck irons that, during his sentence, he had worn for years. He had been sentenced to flogging and transportation in 1822, being then of the ripe age of ten, for poaching. His actual childish crime was the heinous one of having snared a rabbit on the squire's lands.

"There were hundreds, nay thousands of such cases as his in those old evil days. Mere children were sentenced and then flogged and inhumanly ill treated till they were driven to some trifling act of insubordination, and then their sentences were indefinitely expanded.

"In the palmy days of the system the whole thing was a glorious scheme of graft. In the '30s they had in Port Arthur about 1,000 men and from 250 to 300 boys, and their labor for one year was valued at $80,000. The prison officials, who were also in many instances contractors, got the benefit of this forced labor, and hence they saw to it that sentences were extended pretty liberally. Policing the settlement was a cheap and easy job in the old days. And it didn't cost much to feed and clothe the poor devils consigned to this inferno. As for escape, it was well nigh impossible.

"On the landward side was an unknown and inhospitable bush, with a lot of hungry, cannibal niggers, while a score or so of big, wicked-looking sharks all day swam lazily round and sunned themselves in the crystal waters of the harbor, grimly waiting for the poor crazed and desperate devils who from time to time were driven to take a chance that way.

"Well, I'm not squeamish, and I've seen some tough sights in my time; but I was glad to say good-by to the Tasmanian Port Arthur. I'm told it's much changed now, and there's little left to be seen there to-day. Jails have been torn down, prison records have been destroyed and the leg and neck irons melted down or hidden away at nearly all the sites of the old convict settlements in Australia and Tasmania; and as for the poor human documents, they have been gathered into Death's great dustbin.

"But when this war broke out and I began to read so much about Port Arthur it all brought back to me the day, thirty odd years ago, when for the first and only time I got a glimpse of hell upon earth in that other far off southern spot of the same name."

TUBAL CAIN OF OUR GHETTO.

He Works Near the Williamsburg Bridge in a Shop Like a Bit of the Orient.

Not far beyond the shadow of the new Williamsburg Bridge, in a narrow street given over almost exclusively to Russian Hebrews, a skilled artificer in brass has his odd little shop. His burrow is deep in a cellar reached by steep stairs from the street. He displays no sign to attract notice to his business and it is merely a sort of tradition passed from mouth to mouth by his customers—artists, architects, and others whom the original discoverers influence and interest in his behalf.

The workshop of this Tubal Cain of the Ghetto is a small, dingy, ill lit apartment with low ceiling and little furniture. A work bench with vise attached, a hooded portable tripod furnace with a small bellows, a little three holed stove upon which the lone artisan cooks his food, and three or four decrepit chairs make up his movables. His few and simple tools are stowed within easy reach.

Reached by a low door from the rear of the workroom is the tiny bedroom of the artificer, which also serves as showroom and warehouse for his products. The bedroom is scarcely more than eight or ten feet long by six or seven wide. The single window, opening on a narrow alley, gives so little light that the apartment must be artificially illuminated even by day. Two small, red covered couches and a table occupy most of the floor space. The upper part of the room, from a height of six feet up to the ceiling, is occupied for storage.

In these sunless quarters the artificer lives and works alone. He keeps on hand in his old wareroom perhaps $200 worth of his pots and pans. His little bedroom, with its artificial light reflected from the polished surface of tall brazen vases, looks like a shrine. Chance customers enter this tiny apartment and watch the proprietor grope behind curtains above his head for the stored articles he has to display.

His work is Oriental in design, though without the traditional elaborate decoration of East Indian brasses. Many of the larger articles are of dull red copper, rich in the warmth of their shine, and graceful in shape. Some of the more elaborate pieces are highly polished tall brass vases, curious frames carrying many little brass cups for holding flowers, and ewers of copper, some of the form and size used in Oriental countries as toilet articles. Then there are platters and compotes, and tankards and little measures of brass and copper, and teakettles, and, finally, great samovars of brass or copper.

For the most part the artificer's products are for ornament rather than for use, though most of them are developed from articles originally designed mainly for household or lustral purposes. The man and his skill are importations direct from Russia, where he learned and practised his trade. His dingy little workshop and living room are a bit of mingled Oriental gloom and splendor. To dive into that deep cellar from the crowd and bustle of the narrow street outside with its glimpse far overhead of the Bridge panorama outlined in sharp section against the sky is to have the sense of suddenly penetrating into the dim Orient.